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[Timothy Horrigan](#) on [My Encounter With Frank Zappa](#)

[Nahasa Singh](#) on [My Encounter With Frank Zappa](#)

[Cathy Fitzpatrick](#) on [Open Source=Closed Society](#)

[Rósa Dögg](#) on [Open Source=Closed Society](#)

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[Catherine Fitzpatrick](#) on [Open Source=Closed Society](#)

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July 06, 2010

Dan Gillmor's Orwellian News rules

Dan Gillmor, the new media guru and author of *We the Media*, is quick to invoke the word "Orwellian" about the editorial judgement of the New York Times, [pilloring Bill Keller](#) for justifying what he views as his neutral position of quoting different sides in the waterboarding controversy using the words they wish to deploy for the topic, rightly or wrongly.

I'm going to be quick to invoke the word "Orwellian," too, then, since with this new Silicon Valley Influencers-directed campaign, we're now past having this term tethered to actual Stalinist or Nazi practices and their sympathizers in British media of 70 years ago.

You want to talk Orwell? Let's look at [the awful set of rules](#) that Dan Gillmor would have us obey in new media influencing operations that would bear little resemblance to free media as we know it now, but would be something like the Soviet Union's agitprop in the Lenin Corner.

[These 22 rules](#) are...creepy.

First, we "can't" run anniversary stories because this is lazy journalism -- although [Dan himself is not above running his diatibe against Bill Keller](#) opportunistically on July 4th, the nation's birthday, and pegging his piece to notions of independence.

Under these new rules, we're to endure a "multi-directional flow of news and information" without any quality control or accountability -- and bloggers can't look for pay from "the journalism process" (no longer a profession, but a "process") and have to wait for a vague incentive system. Gillmor himself [founded a failed "community journalism" project](#) that he himself critiques, [although others are more pointed](#) -- the problem was too much progressive ideology using "community" as a cover, and not enough actual community, i.e. locality.

Journalists are to make boxes -- like a kind of public stocks -- about "things they don't know" which would rapidly become busy-work to show off and become a fake-humble crowd-pleaser in a public communist-like "self criticism circle". I would sumit a journalist should write what he knows, and if the reader finds it lacking *he can go to another newspaper*.

The section the Times has called "set-rec" where the record is set straight on errors, large and small, would become, in Gillmor's metaverse, a notification service he could sign up for with the slider set to large or small.

There is the usual fetishizing of "the conversation" which is completely at odds with the actualities of most anonymous forums and even those nowadays with Facebook sign-ins. Fetishizing -- except when Gillmor is challenged in a few Twitters, then he tells me "I'm done with this conversation" as a put-down. I get the feeling that like the other tekkie influencers, nobody *ever* debates this thin-skinned propagandist. Why?

In a departure from most mainstream and alternative forums, in Dan's virtual reality, those who wished to comment would *have* to use their real names -- something that shouldn't be required in the name of free commentary. I've always advocated that the Times offer a system whereby if you pay a small fee, and you use your real and verified name to sign up, you could not only leave a comment, but get an answer from the journalists. Yet Dan wants to *enforce* civility -- and of course, that gets us far away from the First Amendment, and even the relatively lenient practices of the Times, or, say, Yahoo News, which lets through many thousands more raucous comments.

Now here's where the New-Speak and the Double-Think get scary. Says Gillmor:

We would replace PR-speak and certain Orwellian words and expressions with more neutral, precise language. If someone we interview misused language, we would paraphrase instead of using direct quotations. (Examples, among many others: The activity that takes place in casinos is gambling, not gaming. There is

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no death tax, death tax can be inheritance or estate tax. Piracy does not describe what people do when they post digital music on file-sharing networks.)

Of course, so bent is Gillmor, in his self-righteousness on correcting the politically-incorrect -- and sinister! -- Bill Keller, he doesn't realize what violence it does to the truth *not to quote a source directly* but to paraphrase using a politically-correct chart. Sorry, piracy *does* describe the *theft* involved in copying and posting digital music; the law applies. Call it euphemistically "sharing" if you must as a progressive propaganda sheet, but quote me accurately if I discuss it in a news story, and allow a variety of viewpoints. Oops, I guess you can't do that -- so much for being "inclusive" and "transparent"!

If Bill Keller caves today on his news judgement about how and whether to use the term "torture"; tomorrow he'll have to be sure he never allows the term "gaming" instead of "gambling" and has to scrub "death tax" out and replace it with "estate tax". And so on. That's what this is about.

Gillmor's rule demanding voluminous hyperliking, like all the fake "Here Comes Everybody" stuff, rapidly devolves into what it always hopes to be -- the "avant-garde of the workers"; where Gillmor's editors would, as he puts it, "use our editorial judgement to highlight the ones we consider best for the members of the community". Sigh. We suffer from that on the Times of course, and this net-nannying shouldn't be further institutionalized.

Says another rule, intrusively:

We would help people in the community become informed users of media, not passive consumers -- to understand why and how they can do this. We would work with schools and other institutions that recognise the necessity of critical thinking.

See, this is that didactic, politicized, politically-correct role that the progressives wish for the media which I hope Bill Keller and others among his peers will resist. We don't need subsidized political media to "work with schools". When that sort of construct is created -- a PC team of news-scrubbers who won't quote people precisely using the terms of their opinion but "correct" them -- then students don't learn to think critically--Gillmor means here that he wants the children to become critical of mainstream media, and consumers of his "work".

This sort of rule makes it clear that what Gillmor is talking about isn't a newspaper in any sense of the term, new or old, but a Bolshevik-type party:

"If we granted anonymity and learned that the unnamed source had lied to us, we would consider the confidentially agreement to have been breached by that person, and would expose his or her duplicity, and identity. Sources would know of this policy before we published. We'd further look for examples where our competitors have been tricked by sources they didn't name, and then do our best to expose them, too."

I [have a mascot](#) for you, Dan.

We can't use the word "must". And "the more we wish we'd done the journalism ourselves, the more prominent the exposure we'd give the other folks' work," says Dan.

Hmmm. Presumably this sort of utopianism and fake humility is what caused Bayosphere, Gillmor's "community journalism" concept to fail -- there isn't a sense of loyalty to brand or company or bottom line; there's no sense of the *commercial* operation that media has to be both to support itself and to win the public trust.

This sort of paper is not one that people will want to read -- it's too didactic:

"The more we believed an issue was of importance to our community, the more relentlessly we'd stay on top of it ourselves. If we concluded that continuing down a current policy path was a danger, we'd actively campaign to persuade people to change course. This would have meant, for example, loud and persistent warnings about the danger of the blatantly obvious housing/financial bubble that inflated during this decade."

Dan always wants the media to be the same as Amnesty International or a political action committee -- each story has to have a "what you can do" box by it. And he has some other great ideas for how to run a newspaper:

"We would make it a habit not to extrapolate a wider threat from weird or tragic anecdotes; frequently discuss the major risks we face and compare them statistically to the minor ones; and debunk the most egregious examples of horror stories that spark unnecessary fear or even panic."

Somehow, I don't think he means global warming...

This Newspaper of the Future has another rule that is sure to make it particularly

Recent Posts

[Dan Gillmor's Orwellian News rules](#)

[The Spy Who Linked Me](#)

[Who Is Scrubbing Anna Chapman's Social Media Footprint--and Why?](#)

[September 15 Elections: Vote for Yassky as Comptroller](#)

[The Moral-Equivalence Squad at the Russian-American Summit](#)

[My Encounter With Frank Zappa](#)

[My 9/11](#)

[The Russian-Georgia War in Cyberspace](#)

[The Bitter Truths of ABC](#)

[Open Source=Closed Society](#)

Archives

[July 2010](#)

[September 2009](#)

[July 2009](#)

[April 2009](#)

[September 2008](#)

[August 2008](#)

[April 2008](#)

[March 2008](#)

[January 2008](#)

Categories

[Council on Virtual Relations](#)
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[Web/Tech](#)

July 2010

dull and preachy:

"No opinion pieces or commentary from major politicians or company executives".

Of course, you get the idea: we should listen to a committee of Silicon Valley Influencers, a handful of technical elites with progressive agendas -- and shut up.

"We'd work in every possible way to help our audience know who's behind the words and actions. People and institutions frequently try to influence the rest of us in ways that hide their participation in the debate, and we'd do our best to reveal who's spending money and pulling strings. When our competitors declined to reveal such things, or failed to ask obvious questions of their sources, we'd talk about their journalistic failures in our own coverage of the issues."

I'll say! Dan Gillmor worked in mainstream journalism for a number of years and then at the *San Jose Mercury* acquired his fame as the first "real" newspaper blog on tech topics. This launched him into a wider career as a Silicon Valley Influencer (as I call people like Mitch Kapor, who funded Dan Gillmor, Steve Gillmor of the Gillmor Gang, Robert Scoble and other tech gurus). Today he is everywhere on blogs, Twitter, mainstream newspapers, conferences, etc. No one ever, ever debates him. Not a critical thing about him can ever be found in Google. And yet his 22 rules for journalism are hugely troubling and make for far more a slippery slope to Orwellianism than Bill Keller sticking to his guns about how he feels a controversy should be framed.

It would be one thing if Gillmor ran his newspaper in this way -- indeed, his blogs or some "progressive" newspapers *are* run this way. But he wants more -- he wants to intrude into the very way society is constructed and bend it to the progressive will:

"We would refuse to do stenography and call it journalism. If one faction or party to a dispute is lying, we would say so, with the accompanying evidence. If we learned that a significant number of people in our community believed a lie about an important person or issue, we would make it part of an ongoing mission to help them understand the truth."

Wait. You would trust this man -- willing to quote people inaccurately, willing to expose confidential sources, and demanding to indoctrinate children in schools with the social task of determining when someone is lying, and when they are articulating a sincerely held opinion?

People in a community "believed a lie"? Or simply *had* a different opinion on their understanding of the intentions and actualities of something like the "death panels" issue? It's one thing to hold a "progressive" opinion -- it's another to foist it on the public coercively by claiming it is a scientific proposition. (Of course, this is what the White House did with their notorious flag@whitehouse.gov concept of turning in your neighbour if they promulgated "incorrect" information about the health care bill.)

I see all this differently.

I see newspapers, in keeping with First Amendment values, not as targets to be hijacked by progressive social justice movements and turned into bully pulpits, but commercial propositions that may be staggering now, but will find a way to adapt and continue to make money with ads as well as paid content and subscriptions. However they survive and continue to serve the public interest *really*, it will not be by becoming sectarian committees of the politically-correct.

Rather than "22 rules," we need simpler validation of what is already implicit in the First Amendment:

The right to an editorial voice.
The right to a political position.
The right to make news judgements.
The right to reflect a variety of viewpoints.

Millions of people aren't persuaded by the incantation of universality arguments - UN treaties, legal language -- that waterboarding is torture. They will have to be convinced in the way you always have to convince people if you do it legitimately, with argumentation, reasoning, facts, field cases, etc. -- not by shaming and browbeating.

P.S. Gillmor's response is to claim his rules are for "transparency" and "inclusiveness" -- both the new "progressive" buzzwords for coerced political correctness.

P.P.S. The ankle-biting Timothy Post, failing as usual to have an original thought, falls back on the usual geek forums-fighter gambit of claiming that **criticism** of a position like Gillmor's (so unexpected! **gasp!** How can this be?!) is the same thing as "attempting to silence" them or "drive them off the Interwebs". I'm not for driving anyone off the Internet (Post and his ankle-biting fellow Komsomoltsy work at that assiduously with their constant mocking, bullying, and harassment of people whose views they don't like). I would consider adding a new rule for a

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25	26	27	28	29	30	31

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\$100 fine for any time someone used the smarmy little fanboyz term "interwebs" however.

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July 04, 2010

The Spy Who Linked Me

I'm written about Anna Chapman's Facebook friends for [RFE/RL](#) -- I continue to maintain that the mainstream media is neglecting to get past the sexy photos and the "real estate gossip-gathering" angle to understand what it going on with this network. The Washington Post's Jeff Stein is [one of the few](#) who at least peered past the photos to speculate one kind of cover the real estate industry might offer to pick up gossip of the rich and famous -- which Anna had actively pursued. My comment there is that Chapman isn't so much about "real estate" as she is about "online vertical search" and "start-up and venture capital" and its relationship to Russia and its new Silicon Valley project, Skolkovo.

Tom Balmforth at Russia Profile also [tries to get past the tabloid surface](#) of sexy photos and banal suburban barbecues and asks Alexander Rahr to comment -- who is a respected authority on Russian intelligence in Germany. But Rahr, too, says he is puzzled why this is about political intelligence and not military or industrial intelligence. That's because he's not looking at the list of Anna's FB friends, but is only reading superficial American press coverage and the FBI's complaints, that focus on the gathering of political intel.

Rahr comes close to the point in this statement:

Rahr said what was most peculiar about the story was that it involved political espionage, rather than industrial or military. "It's a strange story - for me it's hard to believe that Russia is seriously engaged in political spying," he said. "I can imagine that this is not state-sponsored espionage but maybe even some attempt to blackmail or form a pro-Russian business society or business lobby in the United States," said Rahr, adding that there could be more damage to relations done if the trail does end up leading back to Russian officials after the court hearings, which began today.

And to bolster this case I would say that the Kremlin doesn't have to artificially seek to create a pro-Russian business society or business lobby; one already exists that seems to have been entirely organically grown without Kremlin assistance -- AMBAR. AMBAR president Anna Dvornikova, who took the "\$60 billion dollar" big IT del to Russia in May, which also included U.S. National Security advisor Michael McFaul, was friends with Chapman. Was she among her angel investors?

Mahalo, which is the human-powered search run by the notorious Jason Calacanis, fetches up this question: [Will the FBI Question Anna Chapman's Facebook Friends](#)" and helpfully [contains a screenshot](#) of one of Anna's most recent discussions in May on the Village Voice server. Here's a translation (it's part in Russian and part in English):

Anna Chapman In Houston
May 20 at 6:53 pm
Kate Kushenko Oho? How come? Are you flying in space?
Grzegorz Kwolek Houston, we've got a problem
May 21 at 1:30 pm
Anna Chapman Why?
May 21 at 4:10 pm
Max Skibinsky @Greg +1! seesh, dumb blondes: <http://bit.ly/cdl3tY>
May 21 at 4:19 pm
Jenna Borisevich hahahhahah
May 22 at 3:50 pm

Max's link goes to [a UK website explaining the tag line](#) "Houston, we've got a problem" -- which Anna, as good as her English was, hadn't heard -- and it's the sort of American idiom that a Russian who had been living in England, and only recently come to the U.S., wouldn't be expected to know.

This little interchange is useful for understanding a) which people in Anna's friendship list at least felt close enough to talk to her on Facebook; but b) also felt like making a joke at her expense, essentially calling Anna "a dumb blonde" (although she's a redhead).

It occurred to me that Russian intelligence may have used Chapman -- and the other spies in the network -- as much to spy on their fellow Russian expats and emigres and travelling business abroad as they did to spy on Americans. In fact, for the Russian KGB successor, keeping tabs on their own economically-independent and nomadic coder class, particularly those wealthy enough from the start-up industries to have political independence, too, may have been a national security priority. The Russian security apparatus has always been directed first and foremost at its own people.

And if nothing else, through those Russian programmer contacts, heavily integrated with Silicon Valley (which isn't all literally in California), the Russian spymasters could gather intel on U.S. tech industries. The U.S. media has focused exclusively on the angle contained in the FBI's complaint about the spies' purported job of monitoring and reporting on American policy as it relates to economic issues or nuclear weapons, but of course there are other areas of interest to the Kremlin, especially related to Medvedev's pet project Skolkovo, the Russians' reverse-engineering of Silicon Valley.

Anna arguably had more Russian friends than American friends, even though she had spent some years in London, married to a British businessman. I didn't see hardly any British names in the Facebook list as it was viewable at 164 members, down from 181 when she was first arrested. This could be explained by her relative newness to Facebook -- she was on Odnoklassniki, which is the Russian classmates' social network, and on LinkedIn, but perhaps she didn't use Facebook that much.

One news story with a screenshot of a dialogue in Russian unwittingly shows some of her friends who were at least close enough to talk to her about her travels;

Some of those friends who bailed and cut her instantly including the 60-year-old man she was dating, a girlfriend whose Facebook profile seems to have a picture of someone who looks like Anna in it and a few others.

I caught up with some of the people I know on LinkedIn who were showing as related to Chapman. They say Anna must have linked to them, and not visa versa; it's the sort of thing that happens all the time with these services, where the platform itself, using those friend algorithms, constantly serve up people to you to recommend as friends, and where the objective is a game, in a sense, to show who has the most connections. More connections means more useful information, job leads, etc. so people collect friends like seashells. One person speculated that perhaps she had been looking for tech start-up case studies -- I could note that she'd been criticized in AMBAR in the comments to her video taken by Alyona Popova of the online start-up school for not having cases.

One friend who has now hidden her profile, Inga Mikhasiuta, who specializes in the sexy photos that Anna also liked, is fingered by social media maestro Artur Velf in his voluminous commentary on Anna Chapman as a possible honey pot for the FBI -- she awkwardly tried to friend him "translitom" which means writing Russian with the Latin alphabet and not Cyrillic letters (as people who don't have the Cyrillic keyboard often do). He has a theory that this is a set-up organized by the FBI agent writing the complaint on Chapman, whose last name is Patel, with another person named Patel also showing their pictures in their circle -- and of course even his Russian friends have to explain that "Patel" is like "Jones" in terms of being a common name.

Another Facebook friend is Alexander Sasha Galitsky. He is with Almaz Capital Partners January 2008 - Present, describing himself as a Managing Partner in Moscow, and describing the fund, which is from the word "diamond" in Russian, as a high-tech focused Venture Capital fund.

Fox News, always so maligned by the left and always described with such hysteria, is [at least following up diligently on Chapman's facebook list like real reporters](#) -- although they may not be bothering with the ones showing in Cyrillic or whose names mean nothing to them. They've gone after prominent locals or those that look like big hitters, so out of all the media covering this, other than the Soho News, who interviewed Artur Velf, they are the only ones who have interviewed someone in the list, and gotten this reaction:

Another Facebook acquaintance, Alexander Sasha Galitsky, a managing partner for a Moscow-based Almaz Capital Partners, told FoxNews.com that he did not know Chapman personally.

"She tried to raise capital for her online real estate business," he said in an e-mail Tuesday. "After this she tried to speak about some other initiative like online poker, but this is out of our policy."

Another one interviewed is a Brooklyn blogger who doesn't seem to have ever written about Russia although his name could be of Ukrainian or Russian heritage -- like many people in Brooklyn, of course:

Alex Roshuk, an immigration lawyer and Facebook friend of Chapman's, described the woman as a "virtual" acquaintance with similar interests but said he never met her.

"I never met her," Roshuk told FoxNews.com, saying the young woman "friended" him on Facebook just last week.

At least [one tech blogger](#) Eliot's Blog, is looking at the deals around the domains instead of the tits, which is more relevant to this story:

When I saw this domain name mentioned, my eyes grew bigger because I recognized the name. According to a Whois history search, the domain name was [transferred to Moniker Privacy Service](#) sometime around June 22, 2010. I

don't want to mention who the previous owner was because it's very likely he had nothing to do with the buyer.

Interestingly, the domain name was just listed in Ron Jackson's recent [domain sales report](#), which was published a couple of weeks ago. The domain name sold through Moniker for a reported \$25,350, good enough to place #11 on the weekly sales list, and probably good enough to rank as one of the [highest yearly domain sales](#).

I looked up the Whois and found that it has no person's name, only PropertyFinder, the name of Chapman's company. Eliot's curious reticence and protection of "one of his own" here speaks volumes about what is always wrong with tech coverage of the news -- a decided tilt to the tribe.

Speaking of tribes, here's some of the gushing praise for Anna on LinkedIn (now hidden):

[Continue reading "The Spy Who Linked Me" »](#)

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July 03, 2010

Who Is Scrubbing Anna Chapman's Social Media Footprint--and Why?

I wish the tech media would do their job for once. Of course, their primary role is to serve big IT, and so they may be circling the wagons on this and keeping the spy story merely one of ridicule and sympathy for the Russian underdog on purpose, but even so, I expect better. The story particularly of Anna Chapman clearly relates directly to Russia's Silicon Valley, to a high-profile trip to Russia by leading tech California Silicon Valley CEOs "worth \$60 billion" and leads directly to President Dmitry Medvedev. Could we get a little more curious about this, guys -- and stop ogling the missing knickers and do some basic journalistic work?

I've [laid this Silicon-to-Silicon connection out in my article on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#) here and I will keep posting additional information as I find it.

My comments are languishing in the moderator's queue as per usual at TechCrunch on this ["exclusive" story](#) but I managed to get in a comment through the moderator sieve [on Arrington's frivolous take](#) on this 00 and it's maddening because of all people, these Google-saturated geeks should be out there using every connection and gadget they have to figure out why Anna Chapman was so embedded in their midst among their very friends -- and who -- and why -- is removing all her footprints from social media sites (at least in the English language).

Her Linked-in account is now removed from view and/or removed completely. Yesterday, I could still view, it as could others, and find out the pertinent fact that I was one person removed from her or in the second tier away from her circle -- Nic Mitham had friended her for some reason or she had friended him, possibly after attending some start-up or entrepreneurs' event. I also saw on Linked in she was one friend away from former Linden Lab educational evangelist John Lester (the notorious Pathfinder whom I've dissected in detail) but that's because he's friends with Nic or somebody like Nic.

Who is removing this footprint? It's funny to me to hear some people speculate that the FBI is doing this. If they were, they'd have removed all the FB and other footprints of all the spies -- and they haven't. Mikhail Semenko's page is left untouched (and, I might add, other than the son of some people I went to university with, doesn't seem to have anything I can recognize, and no Russian/Silicon Valley sort of connection -- but then, this guy's field was China.) So are some of the other spies. So my guess is either the lawyer is doing it, having gotten the passwords during a jailhouse visit; or the SVR, wanting to remove what traces they can of this sordid and embarrassing affair, especially on **this** particular spy that reaches so close up to Medvedev and Skolkovo -- or it might possible be just a sister or the father, said to be KGB himself, who maybe worked his connections to do an old-fashioned crack of the sites and a scrub. I'm betting it's the lawyer or the sister in the U.S., because the Russian sites have been untouched.

The group that's been useful to watch for various clues has been AMBAR, that seemed paralyzed into inaction after the news struck -- with one member urging everybody to cut cards with her because they might be investigated as illegals by the FBI -- then later posting a link to the story about her sexual adventures. But then, it's not such an active group in this particular manifestation of it -- they'd hardly said anything in the group since May, when they were all impressed by the red-hot redhead *startupshchitsa's* video on how to get venture funding. Pro-tip -- in the U.S. it might have been a good idea to spell the word "ventures" properly in the name of your adventure -- Anna's project mentioned in the video is TIME Venchures. Of course, Time Magazine was one of the open venues that the spies used to communicate with each other, which we learn from one of the gee-whiz

spy tech articles -- although it does not appear Chapman used this method.

The Facebook account was hidden yesterday the pictures hidden or removed. Now you can only see any friends you have in common with Anna Chapman. I've kept the list and I've been researching the people on it. The 60-year-old rich guy she was dating is one of those who cut her out of his list when he learned she was a spy -- and can you blame him? He gets what this is about. Not everybody is working to spin this story as a plot of evil Amerika against everything-that-is-good-for-you, Obama, and earnest innovation-seeking Russkis -- like Peter Lavelle, Timothy Post and Sean, the Guy who has a Blog Named Sean's Blog. They realize that even a charge of "working for a foreign government" is a serious one, and just because there haven't been espionage charges yet, doesn't mean they might not appear -- and they may not appear merely to protect work that law-enforcement is doing in other areas.

When you get past the Boris and Natasha stuff on the TechCrunch video, Paul Carr has a good point -- it used to be journalists were the spies, because they could travel anywhere and ask any questions. Now, with media dying, and the journalists' jobs and overseas budgets drying up, what figure in society can play this role? And the answer is: the entrepreneur, the start-up geek, because he has to aggressively push himself everywhere, network with tons of people, ask questions constantly -- especially in the social media biz. Perfect cover.

For some reason, TechCrunch's [Erick Schonfeld](#) turned in a piece he called "an exclusive" which we'd all seen days ago which is just her web page [NYCrentals](#) (which also has a twitter account) and its "biznes-plan". It has that same amateurish (or fake spy cover) feel -- and TechCrunch didn't bother to ask any of the 30,000 Russians living near its offices (or me!) to translate the video which you can see [here](#) (watch both parts, and read the comments, too) -- the interview by web entrepreneur and new media consultant Alyona Popova. Popova felt she had a good example of someone benefiting from her "online school for startupery" (as they are called in Russian, hilariously) in Chapman, but her readers were skeptical -- one former Facebook friend of Anna's named Artur Velf raises an eyebrow and wonders who Chapman, who only a few months previously, was seeking her own venture capital, was now dispensing advise about how to raise it. In the AMBAR group, someone comments that she hasn't supplied any real case studies.

Velf takes the position, [in a huge long wall debate worthy of Dostoyevsky](#) and several other debates on Facebook with many participants, that she is innocent, the victim of some kind of plot, and even comes up with a theory that the FBI agent, whose last name is "Patel," is related to another "Patel" in the Facebook circles of Chapman, and therefore it's all some kind of sinister set-up. He says he met her at a venture conference in 2008 and she's just a real-estate agent. Velf writes on social media and is prominent in these circles; I'm trying to figure out why he feels such compulsion to spin the story of Anna Chapman's arrest as a function of evil Amerika and not her working for the SVR as the FBI maintains.

Here he is [giving an interview to ABC](#) swearing of her innocent:

Arthur Welt (sic), a 36-year-old Russian journalist living in Moscow who first met Chapman in 2008 at a start-up conference, said the idea that Chapman is a spy is "nonsense."

"She was very professional in the real estate market," Welt said. "Startup founders don't have time, especially not for espionage."

Right. Out of all the bloggers and friends in her list and commentators, nobody seems to be working as hard as Mr. Velf to spin this story away from looking like what it appears to be -- a spy related to Skolkolov and Silicon Valley. Why?

The lawyer is constantly quoted saying this:

Chapman's attorney Robert Baum said, "The government's case is very thin against Ms. Chapman. There is no allegation that she ever met face to face with any governmentt official. No allegation despite constant surveillane that she ever delivered anything to anyone or received any money."

As news accounts (and the complaint itself which you can get online) say this, however:

The complaint charging Chapman alleges that on 10 occasions between Jan. 2010 and June 2010, Chapman was observed on FBI surveillance communicating covertly via a private internet wireless network with a Russian government official including a coffee shop at 47th and 8th Ave and other locations around New York City. On Saturday, the day before she was arrested, the FBI used an undercover FBI agent, posing as a Russian Consulate employee to approach Chapman to set up a meeting with her to discuss problems she was having with her computer.

I guess "being in the same cafe as a Russian government official and transmitting coded message over an encrypted line that the FBI has identified" is equal to "not meeting face to face" and "not deliverying anything" LOL.

Velf points out that Nur Rubini was among Chapman's friends but he cut her.

I have to credit ABC for so far being the *only* media outlet that is doing the investigative journalistic job of searching through the Facebook and LinkedIn lists and trying to interview the subjects. They came up with only one name with anything to say about, however:

Chapman was a Facebook friend of well-known economist and NYU Stern Business School professor Nouriel Roubini. Roubini, dubbed "Dr. Doom," has been credited with predicting the global economic meltdown and is well-known on the New York club circuit.

Chapman and Roubini were Facebook friends until this morning, when the former Director of the Office of Policy Development and Review at the U.S. Treasury Department removed her from his friend's list.

Roubini, who is also the former senior economist for international affairs with the White House Council of Economic Advisors, told ABC News that Chapman had "befriended" him on Facebook.

"I may have met her socially on one or two occasions in a large party (not at my place) and never had a one to one conversation or meeting with her," Roubini said. He added that he has no association with Chapman nor would ever want to have one.

At one point, listening to her second video, the thought crossed my mind that Chapman was set up by Russians in the Skolkovo project, precisely because she disses the venture capital prospects in Moscow so badly -- or perhaps because the SVR simply needed to have some scapegoats and a case that would help galvanize that sort of indignant, protective, patriotic feeling that Velf is so good at gushing on cue, and the sort of sympathy-for-the-underdog and regrets and not helping Russian ventures more that Sarah Lacey is also gushing on cue. At times thinking about this case I wonder if it is an elaborate set-up (as in my favourite book about Russia, "The Set Up" by Volkov), in which the case was created to elicit a series of other events indirectly -- in this case, the bonding of Skolkovo and Silicon people, and others in other relevant policy feels, to feel as if they are victims of hardliners and hawks on both sides, and can go questing together into the brave new future, smarter and more special than everyone else, and of course, surrounded by idiots.

In her video, Chapman basically says that unless you can suck up to some big firm you can't get in -- and the small businesses are just too niche and don't warm to any outsiders so it's all impossible. Yet she then miraculously cuts through all these difficulties and gets her funding -- in ways we never quite here in these two length videos (she said she had 6 investors; I wonder if Dvornikova, the angel investor of the American Silicon Valley, was one of them; they were FB friends).

I've studied the website domdot.ru -- it's fairly sophisticated as far as its interface and coding and functionality. It's not a craigslist because it isn't as cluttered and is more focused in putting buyer and seller together and apparently running a side consulting business in lead generation for sales agents. There was a team of people coding this site, obviously -- not Anna, who didn't study computer science, isn't a programmer, and was in economics and finance. The team is all listed in her social circle on Yandex -- but they all seem to have left in 2008 and 2009, and it's not clear who replaced them -- whether the team merely got sick, after the first flush of enthusiasm, of recording their fabulous coding adventure on social media, or whether some people removed themselves.

The young people in this social circle don't seem to be *Zolotaya Molodezh* (Golden Youth, privileged children of high-ranking government officials), but if you go through their ranks, you find those kind of sturdy, solid older men who built the BAM and run the industrial complex of the Soviet Union and its successor state, Russia, Inc.

Someone on TechCrunch who says he knows them says they couldn't compete in the cut-throat start-up environment, and she took the technology and business to New York. Yet the site still functions at domdot.ru

I'm wondering if her TIME Ventures has anything to do with the company of one of her Facebook connections but it might be purely coincidence, as it may just be a cool-sounding name. (In the 1990s, Russians would name their companies after their wives, mistresses, or children -- or small animals -- so you'd get firms with names like Belochka or Belka. Nowadays they seem to like to put a foreign word into the mix like "Invest".)

Posted at 05:28 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

September 06, 2009

September 15 Elections: Vote for Yassky as Comptroller



David Yassky is running for NYC Comptroller.

September 15 will be election, and if you are like me, you're getting mighty sick not only of all the robo-calls, but the mounds of junk mail.

I think nowadays, like a lot of people voting, I pay more attention to email and Facebook than junkmail which aggravates me. So I pay attention to the Freelancer's Union, which says:

"[Christine Quinn](#) has been a strong ally for independent workers, championing our Unincorporated Business Tax proposal, which was just signed into law, and she will continue to fight for us to meet the needs of freelancers."

She's in the Murray Hill area.

In our area, a candidate who also supported reducing the harsh impact of the Unincorporated Business Tax on freelancers and home workers was [David](#)

[Yassky](#).

Says the [Freelancers' Union](#):

"We've endorsed [David Yassky for Comptroller](#) for all that he has done—like tax reform—and all that he will do, like creating unemployment protection for freelancers."

The flyers are getting bigger and more colorful and glossy and more frantic about the "hate" in "negative campaigns" of the other guy (itself a kind of hate) -- and the cost in designing and producing and mailing it would likely be enough to put some people without health insurance like me on at least some minimal plan...

But it rains, and pours, and it is hard to pick your way through it. I did save the magazine printed on newsprint that seemed to describe all the positions, but to be honest, like other people in the neighborhood, I'm going to be looking for the candidates who actually get up and out on the street to shake hands with people and hear their concerns about issues like health and housing, people like [Brian Kavanagh](#) who has always walked around the ward here the old-fashioned way unlike the ward-mailers who never seem to set foot up here.

I will be struggling to make sense of them all -- but I have a request for next time. Could you guys and gals quit it with the endorsements from the big guys? I don't care if Mayor Koch endorses you or if you are Cy Vance's son. I'd like to know what YOU stand for. Your endorsements might give you some luster, but they aren't helpful in really pulling the lever, to be honest.

[Continue reading "September 15 Elections: Vote for Yassky as Comptroller" »](#)

Posted at 01:23 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

July 08, 2009

The Moral-Equivalence Squad at the Russian-American Summit

This sort of article, even by Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe -- which knows better -- was bound to appear during the Russian-American summit with the first black American president visiting the Kremlin. Just as the politically-incorrect Charles Wangel quipped that Obama should stay out of visiting some New York City neighbourhoods, where even black policemen are mistaken for criminals and shot to death by their fellow policemen -- Obama should stay out of a lot of Moscow neighbourhoods where even just plain white Americans can face rampant hatred.

Criticism of American racism was a long-time staple of Soviet propaganda, and the existence of both slavery and its after-effects in racist policies were often duplicitously used by the Soviets to distract from their own crimes against humanity on their own territory.

It seems as a consequence of that very effective propaganda, especially as imbibed more uncritically by the Internet generation, liberal intelligentsia in both America and Russia today still see the American legacy of slavery and racism as "worse" than anything that ever occurred in the Soviet Union. I think this bears some nuanced context -- and a lot more history than it gets.

People who have a stake in trying to portray the U.S. as "worse" cite what in fact was highly selective propagandistic Soviet manipulation of figures like Paul Robeson as proof that the Soviets were "more tolerant". Or they cite the presence of a figure like Yelena Khanga in the Russian elite of today as proof that Russians are "more" progressive and tolerant on race.

They aren't. And the Soviet legacy is abysmal, regarding the minorities and non-Russian ethnic groups on Soviet territory as well as those of Africa descent.

The alarming increase in racist murders in Russia indicated by the research of Sova and other human rights monitors is part of the story that lets us know that all is not well with the issue of race in Russia today.

But it's also worth looking at the two countries over a longer period of time.

[Continue reading "The Moral-Equivalence Squad at the Russian-American Summit" »](#)

Posted at 07:38 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

April 14, 2009

My Encounter With Frank Zappa



[Weasels Ripped My Flesh cover by Neon Park. 1970.](#)

It was a curious encounter indeed -- and a memorable one, and was strange and directly appealing, the way everything about [Frank Zappa](#) had been strange and directly appealing from the beginning.

I first saw [Frank Zappa's odd albums](#) in the record store when I was 13 and 14, in the old days, when they sold big 33 1/3 RPM vinyl records in stores, in big cardboard jackets with album art. *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* was one album with a creepy parody of a 1950s sort of commercial on the cover. There were albums Zappa produced as well like Capt. Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica* and [Wild Man Fischer](#).

Somehow, I recall an album, or perhaps it was even the B side of a 45, in which it seemed to me Frank Zappa was singing (but it was more likely Wild Man Fischer, characterized as insane, even violently so at times) a very odd song, "Miss Jennifer Jones is lying dead on the porch doo doo doo doooh." The song was so arresting because its content was so unlike the sugary bubblegum stuff we usually heard on the radio (at least until I started listening to Spark Hicks' WCMF.fm), and unlike a lot of rhyming romantic 1960s Mo-town stuff, and was more like an opera, telling a story, albeit a very grotesque one of a bizarre murderous rampage. I didn't understand any of this -- the weasels, the dead Miss Jones -- but I felt it was some kind of fascinating parody that was saying something more deep and mysterious about our age than was usually being said.

Zappa had a strange fascination for us. There was the name of the band which seemed so clever -- "Mothers of Invention" (necessity being the mother of that). Then there were all the strange songs that were stories, not just banal lyrics. It's hard to explain now why the weirdness of those songs and the album art and the deconstruction of the 1950s and [parody of the 1960s](#) seems so penetrating -- yet it did. I never saw Zappa in any concert, I don't think the Mothers ever came touring close enough to where we lived, but I was interested to follow his career, read about him in Rolling Stone, and see that he even inspired the Czech dissident band [Plastic People of the Universe](#) -- in Eastern Europe, where perhaps the edginess of weird deconstructions were more keenly in demand, Zappa was very popular, maybe even more than at home in the U.S. In time, Zappa also came to fight the good fight against censorship of rock music which took the form of a battle over ratings of music (something I'm not sure I oppose, but given the context, it was good Zappa took on the fight).

Back in February 1990, Vaclav Havel, who had just been elected president by a now-free Czechoslovakia, came to the United States for a kind of victory tour, stopping to see the people who had supported him when he was a political prisoner. I worked for several organizations that had campaigned for him and for

the rock musicians and we were all invited to a gala event at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York, followed by a fancy reception. The event was very crowded, and I found myself standing next to one of the former political prisoners I knew from various travels who had now been made minister of something -- there was a lot of this free and exciting feeling in the early days of the Havel administration when everyone thought this playwright-turned-dissident-turned-politician was going to represent some kind of new form of governance. Remember, this was even before the Soviet coup defeat in 1991, and of course long before 9/11, it was a day when the wind was really in the sails of citizens' movements especially in Eastern Europe.

[Continue reading "My Encounter With Frank Zappa" »](#)

Posted at 02:34 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(3\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

September 11, 2008

My 9/11



9/11 for me has always been a living embodiment of [W.H. Auden's Musee de Beaux Arts](#) -- my daughter marvelled at the way in which people kept walking their dogs and even getting a suntan along the banks of the East River even while the horror downtown was unfolding.

I found this year on the 7th anniversary that I simply didn't want to remember or memorialize at all. I will wait until another year to pull out envelopes of items related to 9/11 or watch TV. I didn't go to the memorial service at our church as I have done other years or go to the memorial garden made from cement and metal from the site in memory of our parishioners who died there as well as Fr. Mykal. I listened to my son recount his memories of that day, but the conversation was brief. At the time, he concluded, at the age of 9, "God is a terrorist." He's remained with that conclusion, which I think is intellectually and emotionally sound, given the circumstances, which is that God enabled terrorists to kill innocent people. I don't think God is a terrorist, I merely think He has given man free will, and these are the results. My son, who exercises a great deal of free will that then leads to his free will being removed for periods of time when he is grounded, hasn't grasped yet the larger context of free will -- but then, he's young.

So I wasn't even going to blog, and it was only Zha Ewry's pious musings that impelled in me that notion of civic duty that makes me write again, and again, and write too long, and write in a way that is not accessible to many people, but that's ok, write I must.

At the time, a week or so after that attacks, there was suddenly an alarm at the Empire State Building where I had just been for a meeting and where a colleague was still up on a higher floor -- there was concern that it was going to be "next". It was a bomb scare, and false alarm, but like a lot of the false alarms in those first days of copycatting, you couldn't be sure. I had already taken a hike down lots of stairways in that building because of a false alarm, and while it was reasonable to consider it was another one, I sent an email to the friend in case they were glued to the screen and not paying attention but the phone wasn't answering.

We went to my son's window and stared out at the Empire State Building, which could still be seen in those days before construction blocked it, and began the mental trajectory that all New Yorker's seem to instinctively know these days especially due to constant crane accidents -- if that building falls, will it fall on *me*? Am I in its pathway?

"Are they going to attack our house?" my daughter asked, worried. "No," I said. "They only attack symbols. They crashed into the World Trade Center because it's a symbol."

"But am *I* a symbol?" my little seven-year-old daughter asked, without hesitation.

Chilling, that a child would have to ask that question at such a tender age, not even quite understanding what "symbols" are -- taking it literally as "the thing you become because people make you one." We're not special -- all kinds of people have to live under armed conflict all over the world, but it hasn't been the norm in the U.S.

And I while I tried to reassure my daughter at the time, I would have to conclude philosophically that yes, a little white American girl is a symbol. Just like a little Jewish girl in Israel is a symbol. And, some leftwingers will hasten to add, a little Palestinian girl is a symbol.

And here's where I say, "No." The little Palestinian girl is *not* a symbol, dehumanized, for Israel as a state, or Israeli armed forces or movements (if they existed) to attack *deliberately* as it is for Palestinians, both the armed movements and the mobilized civilians. Israel is not a state funding suicide bombers as other states are; it is not sanctioning and excusing the deliberate attack on civilians; its citizens don't dance in the streets at another's misfortune, as Palestinians did after 9/11. If Israel has in fact been responsible for the deaths of innocents it is due to accident, disproportionate use of force, even larger policies like the settlements which one might conclude are responsible, but it is not the same kind of raw, murderous, deliberate hateful logic of symbolism that a suicide bomber engages in. There aren't any Israeli suicide bombers. If throughout history you can dredge up examples of a Jewish terrorist here or there, everyone has to concede that they are not the norm, and dwarfed by the numbers of Palestinians. There isn't a moral equivalence to the two sides when you look at the use of symbols. It's one-sided. And that's why the morality you develop around this can't be falsely "bilateral".

And that's why, on this day, I don't fetch up moral equivalence bromides and follow faddish activities like "The Day of Interdependence" trying to whip up more blame to distribute to the U.S. and other Western nations for its bad policies (the war in Iraq) -- [as Zha Ewry does here](#), just to cite one of many examples. And maybe it's simply because Zha, who went to the exact same area I did on that fateful day, had a very different day..

[Continue reading "My 9/11" »](#)

Posted at 01:00 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

August 16, 2008

The Russian-Georgia War in Cyberspace



I've been avidly reading all the mainstream media about the war between Russia and Georgia, like many in and out of this field of Eurasian studies, and of course reading alternative sites like [Open Democracy](#) and various blogs and lists, like [Johnson's list](#), which has tilted pro-Russian as it often does. These are all standard Internet Web 1.0 tools for understanding the situation officially, or unofficially but within a kind of framework, along with your Skype and your private email where you can hope to write friends in both countries to try to round out the picture.

But this war is different in that it has richly played out on Web 2.0 tools as well, in ways that the mainstream media hasn't even noticed. I got my

first pictures from the war outside the standard AP issue by seeing in [Tweetscan](#) that [someone had Twittered](#) about [navoine.ru](#) -- a harrowing photo essay that shows the raw ugliness of war -- burnt people, in jumbles of flesh and bone... Of course, [the war began in cyberspace](#), and [Georgia's government](#) made use of Google blogging when temporarily disabled, and the war [continues there](#) (cyberspace is the continuation of war by other means, as Lawrence Weschler once said, "war was the continuation of TV by other means" in the Balkans. For the first time, you could hear an American General [give a briefing](#) in which he talked seriously about hacking of websites as a matter of international security, and how the U.S. became involved in hosting Georgian government sites temporarily.

I was actually surprised to log on in Second Life at the Memory Bazaar and find two posts on the bulletin board there saying RUSSIA OUT OF GEORGIA! and then of course the trolling maria30 klaar writing AND U.S. OUT TOO! I saw some discussions in Second Life, including one scheduled for 6:00 am SLT tomorrow by a European fearing to lose Internet service. I expected -- and got -- the belligerent Russian commentary which Evegency Morozov has [effectively written](#) about as the outsourcing of hate.

But nothing prepared me for this: a Facebook group I myself joined casually the other day thinking it would never have more than a few hundreds members that has grown to a whopping 16,650 people, called [Stop the Russian aggression against Georgia](#). The group gained 3,615 More Members since I logged on yesterday, is showing 13 videos, has 67 Board Topics, and 2,276 Wall comments - of course many pro and con. Five demonstrations are already being organized, in Washington, London, the Hague, and Tbilisi. Well, imagine all of this! Just imagine! Of course, as I've written before, [we are not really 69 million of anything](#), and the 16,650 people, while impressive, and even if 1 percent go to demonstrations and write congressmen, often don't have any real social weight. And yet...and yet...

[Continue reading "The Russian-Georgia War in Cyberspace" »](#)

Posted at 02:43 AM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

April 27, 2008

The Bitter Truths of ABC

[Hendrik Hertzberg got it all wrong](#). I'll explain how it works.

Oh, sure, [ABC](#) may have been glib or even fatuous -- but this is TV, not a Mensa debate. George Stephanopoulos -- anything associated with the Clintons -- can be irritating, sure.

But let me show you how it works.

[Continue reading "The Bitter Truths of ABC" »](#)

Posted at 03:05 AM in [Media Criticism](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

March 09, 2008

Open Source=Closed Society

Tony Curzon-Prize, who visited Second Life recently, has [an editorial up today at opendemocracy.net about Zittrain's presentation](#). In a fitting (unwitting) coda to his piece, I can't get logged in to his site to leave a comment. My usual password doesn't work, I finally get the right user name, I urge the system to send me my password again...and it never comes, and no, duh, it's not in the spam filters, which of course I long ago learned to look into. Closed out again, from the Open Society of Open Democracy by a technical glitch (not a ban, in this case, but it could be that at other venues like Terra Nova).

Tony's pieces are always very thinky, and it's always good to find someone this thoughtful on these issues, but they're usually about one or two levels above what I'm willing to exert on a Sunday afternoon. I spent years studying Aristotle, but what's "Aristotelean" about Zittrain's comments escapes me, and it's one of those occasions when you wish the author, instead of appearing learned, would teach, so that others could learn. No matter. The point is he's willing to give a critical study of Zittrain, which is a public service.

Zittrain is ranting on in PowerPoints about all these top-down evil structures that want to control the Internet and which we must fight. However, what we really must fight is him and his technolibertarian viewpoints because ironically, the big bland corporations that he rails against, just by showing up, having a bottom line, and maintaining the rule of law, may provide more liberties for the average person than he's willing to admit. This is an awful trade-off, of course, the kind of trade-off that any cradle-to-grave socialism or corporativism will make, but the question has to be starkly asked online.

When Zittrain (or Curzon-Price) waves around the term "communitarian," I can't help thinking they've merely found a term that they think will have less baggage than communism. But communitarianism is no better, in placing the "community" (as they define it) above the individual, and talking about "social needs" and such -- as these techno-elites, again, define them.

[Continue reading "Open Source=Closed Society" »](#)

Posted at 04:52 PM in [Science](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(12\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

